

# WARP

by

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## STATEMENT OF DISSERTATION APPROVAL

The dissertation of Laura Bylenok  
has been approved by the following supervisory committee members:

<u>Jacqueline Osherow</u>	, Chair	<u>April 27, 2016</u> <small>Date Approved</small>
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## ABSTRACT

The poems in this collection are situated in the multiple definitions of the verb “warp,” which in contemporary usage most often means “to distort,” but is also used to describe what happens to space and space-time in the theory of relativity. In addition, the OED entry for the word includes multiple rare and obsolete definitions, such as “to trample to death,” “to lay on hands,” “of wind: to rise up,” and “of bees: to swarm.” These definitions enter the poems in implicit and explicit ways: some poems take definitions as epigraphs, and others break away from that framework but are inflected by the multiple meanings spilling over into the whole.

*Warp* opens with an epigraph from the *Ancrene Wisse*, translated from the Middle English to: “what is a word but wind? ...a puff of wind, a word, may warp her.” In contemporary translations of this passage, the original *warpen* has been rendered as “may fell her,” “may throw her,” or “may cast her down.” Here, however, the use of “warp” restores a plurality of meanings. The passage resonates in several ways. It unites breath and language with wind, so the natural world becomes a vehicle for the force of poetry. It also bestows on language the power to shape a person and to break her. Not only are we cast by language, but we are warped—distorted, thrown down, even put to death—by it.

The history of warp weaves together threads of distortion, trajectory, and impact. Reproduction joins the fray. Warp becomes a figure for change, and in Henri Bergson’s words: “To exist is to change, to change is to mature, to mature is to go on creating oneself endlessly.” Warp is a word warped and warping over time, traveling as a shuttle, as a ship. Relativity becomes linguistic and warps the fabric of language, through which we conceive of space-time

itself. By moving through the history and intricacies of warp, these poems explore distortion in definition and identity, inscription and signature, the loss of self and other, permanence and impermanence, and the nature of subject, object, and perception.